DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 749 HE 017 432

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TITLE Institutional Response to Problems of Returning Adult Students in Western Pennsylvania.
PUB DATE May 84
NOTE 44p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Students; Ancillary School Services; Full Time Students; Higher Education; Needs Assessment; *Reentry Students; School Surveys; Student Characteristics; *Student College Relationship; *Student Needs; Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS *Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

Problems associated with the returning adult student and methods used by colleges to address these problems were investigated. Attention was focused on full-time adult students registered in the traditional daytime program. A questionnaire was developed, based on typical problems identified through a literature review. Forty-two colleges and universities in western Pennsylvania were surveyed. Areas of study were: whether the school had a population of returning students; criteria used to identify the returning adult student; recruitment efforts for adult students; entry into the system; program and service needs of these adults; special staffing and funding to meet the needs of adult students; and interpersonal relationships with family, faculty, and other students. Findings indicate that: 11 schools did not have a returning adult population, 10 schools had some returning adult students but had developed no procedures for identifying them; 4 schools provided estimates of their traditional and adult populations; and 5 schools reported percentages. It was found that institutions varied widely in their attempts to meet the needs of these students. Many schools were unprepared to meet the needs of a population they had not defined. (SW)

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Institutional Response to Problems of Returning Adult Students in Western Pennsylvania

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May, 1984

HE017432

Abstract

A questionnaire was designed based upon four critical problems which emerged from a review of the literature concerning returning adult college and university students. A survey of forty-two institutions of higher education in western Pennsylvania was conducted to discover the extent of the returning adult population in each of the institutions and to examine the ways in which the institutions address each of the problems suggested in the literature review. The results of the survey reveal that institutions vary widely in their attempts to meet the needs of this segment of students. The methods used by schools that have achieved a high degree of success in the recruiting and retaining of returning adult students are reported, discussed and analyzed for the purpose of offering possible solutions and directions that might be taken to offset problems indigenous to the growing returning adult population on today's college campuses.

Statement of the Problem

This study will identify problems associated with the returning adult student and investigate methods used by some institutions of higher education to address these problems.

Problems will be identified through a review of the literature concerning returning adult students. In order to determine the ways in which institutions are addressing these problems, a survey of selected colleges and universities in western Pennsylvania will be conducted. Whenever possible, surveys will be supplemented by interviews with key administrators in person and via telephone.

Review of the Literature

In a recent newspaper article, Dr. Barbara Wood, Coordinator for the Returning Adult Student Center at the Pennsylvania State University stated: "No longer is it appropriate to think of education as being just for the young. Education is a life-long process. It's not a new concept, but people are now just starting to believe it (Curry, 1984, p. 3)." In his book Megatrends, John Naisbett reinforces this point when he suggests that "the notion of lifelong learing is already replacing the short-term approach to education, whereby you went to school, graduated and that was that (Naisbett, 1982, p. 95)."

It is this trend toward lifelong education that has precipitated some problems on the college campus with its attendant influx of the older returning student.

In the review of the literature, four major problem areas related to the returning adult student emerged:

A. existence of a returning adult population and criteria used to identify the returning adult student;

B. entry into the system;

C. needs of the returning adults once in the system (programs and services);

D. interpersonal relationships with family, faculty and other students.

A. Existence of a returning adult population on campus and criteria used to identify them

These two problems are intertwined. Until a specific definition is developed, most institutions have no way of knowing or identifying their returning adult population. Attempts to differentiate the returning adult student from the traditional student have created considerable confusion in the literature. There is wide variation in the criteria used to define the returning adult student. The criteria vary from student age; whether or not there has been prior exposure to higher education; psychological maturity of the student and for some, their sociological role in the community (Vernor, 1964).

Evidence garnered from both the literature review and the institutional survey indicates that the definition of a returning adult student ranges from someone who is twenty-six years of age and who has at least a minimum exposure to college to someone who is eighteen years of age and has been out of secondary school for at least two years. Between these age parameters, twenty-five years of age seems to be the most frequently used reference point. There are those who feel that age is not an adequate criteria for determining those individuals who could succeed as returning adult students. Age as it relates to ability to learn is frequently cited as an important factor (Kidd, 1973, Godbey, 1977, Apps, 1981, Cross, 1981). However, all of these researchers indicate that there are compensations and adjustments made by individuals which allow them to overcome most of the physical problems such as decreased vision or impaired hearing which occur with encroaching age.

Identification of the returning adult student, or at least a common definition for them, would seem to be imperative because most institutions must attempt to tailor special programs to meet the needs of these unique students.

B. Entry into the educational system

Some adults enter through a Continuing Education Program,

others arrive through special programs such as the "Displaced Homemakers Program", still others will enter in the traditional fashion. Thus, where and how one enters the institution and how one is treated depends largely on the school's system for identifying, defining and placing the returning adult student. The increasing use of computers by most colleges and universities may serve to ease some of the problems directly involved with admission to a program and registration for classes which currently seem to plague many students. However, present admission procedures tend to be complicated, clumsy, tedious and confusing. This situation creates an aggravation for the returning adult. They tend to lose confidence in the administrative staff and their ability to service the students' needs.

This leads directly to another problem involving the adult student. There is a tendency for many colleges to be inflexible in their approach to admission procedures, class scheduling and their use of faculty. These must be flexible in order to create and sustain new programs for the adult student (Hodgkinson, 1977). In addition, these institutions tend to be inflexible in structuring the use of the physical facilities even in such mundane areas as traffic control, parking permits, parking lot locations, etc. This inflexibility is related to the fact that their programs are designed to meet the needs of the

of the younger traditional student.

The literature indicates that many institutions of higher education do not recognize the fact that time is a very precious commodity for the returning adult. Class schedules, designed as they are for the traditional student, are often imcompatible with the daily schedule of the returning adult. Thus conflicts are created in both campus and home life of the re-entry student.

Most colleges and universities, even those with a significant adult population, lack a specific adult orientation program. This creates another adjustment problem in addition to the difficulties already cited. Despite the fact that adult needs are quite unique, the tendency seems to be to hold a freshman orientation and not to bother with a special orientation for re-entry students. The absence of a specific orientation program simply adds to the confusion of the returning adult who is probably already experiencing "entrance anxiety".

C. Needs of the returning adults once they are in the system

Returning adults frequently have obligations aside from their college work that tend to complicate their college routine. Statistics indicate that, presently, women outnumber men in the ranks of the returning adults (Carnahan, 1983) and many of these women are single parents of small children. Thus, child care becomes a very critical concern for the parent and the

school. It has been pointed out that coordinating child care is one of the primary needs of returning women (Pollard and Galliano, 1982). Those parents with school-aged children also have the added obligation to attend their childrens' school functions and to be available for the inevitable parent-teacher conferences.

For a large part of the returning adult population, male and female, finances constitute the greatest deterrent to a college education (Apps, 1977). While there is financial aid available in the form of loans and grants, if this is not publicized the student has no way of knowing how to access the financial aid system. Therefore, inaccessible information is irrelevant. Again, the single parent female may be the one most likely to need this kind of information and she is often the one who apt to be the least likely to learn about it.

D. Interpersonal relationships with faculty and other students and family

For the returning adult student, family support (or the lack of it) can be another critical factor in whether or not they will complete their course of study (Apps, 1982). For a woman with a husband and family at home, this is particularly true. As she grows more confident in her school career, her self image and sex role begin to change. She changes as a person and the

members of her family, who have their own view of her role, may find it difficult to adjust to the new woman in their life (Roach, 1976). A returning adult woman with a family is faced with the need to balance her scholastic interests on one hand with her family obligations on the other. Reaction to these dual role expectations often leads to an effort to adjust which in turn may lead to a de-emphasis of either the schoolwork or family obligations. Eventual withdrawal from school is often the only answer to assuage the guilt feelings that develop when this situations pertains.

The returning adult male also has a set of built-in problems. A typical scenario for a returning adult male is that he may have been unemployed for a long period of time with the attendant financial problems and psychological stress, or he may simply be trying to escape a dead-end job (Lenz and Shavitz, 1977). He has, then, a very definite purpose for returning to school such as retraining for a new, more challenging career. He has often been through a period of self-examination and self-doubt and has reached his own conclusions concerning how to extricate himself from his present set of problems. He has usually built up a set of expectations about school and he believes it is up to the school to help him realize these expectations.

In the area of interpersonal relationships with the faculty, some instructors who have returning adults in their classes maintain the view that "education of adults is an inferior activity when compared to the education of youth...this has and will continue to have a profound effect upon the adult's learning opportunities (Apps, 1981)." As student populations change, and if, as predicted, there is an influx of older, adult students, this attitude on the part of some instructors will probably change as they realize that the present of adult students in the classroom can be very rewarding for all concerned.

Ironically, the problems discovered in this review of the literature are not new. They have been recognized by Helen Astin in 1977, Lenz and Shavitz in 1977, and Howard Bowen in 1980, as well as others. It is apparent that little progress has been made toward easing re-entry for the returning adult student and making it possible for them to stay in school once they have returned.

Methods

In February of 1984 letters were sent to administrators of thirty-four colleges and universities located in an area extending from the Susquehanna River on the east to the Pennsylvania-Ohio line on the west (See Appendix A). The source for the list of these schools was the 1983-84 edition of

Keys to Collegiate Educational Opportunities in Pennsylvania published by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency and the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Universities. Contact was made with eight branch campuses of The Pennsylvania State University system located within the designated area, bringing the total of all contacts to forty-two. Sixteen of the institutions contacted responded by mail. Eighteen non-respondents were contacted by telephone in order to complete the survey (a copy of the telephone survey instrument may be found in the appendix). These, plus the eight branch campuses in The Pennsylvania State University system contacted constitute a total sample of forty-two schools (see Table 1).

Personal intereviews were held with administrators of six selected schools. Four were selected because they indicated high levels of activity with returning adult students (Villa Maria, Seton Hill, Carlow College and the New Kensington branch of The Pennsylvania State University). One (St. Vincent's) was chosen because it is a school in transition from all male to co-ed and the investigator was interested in determining if their future plans included the active recruitment of returning adult students. This seemed to be a logical question to pursue, in light of the declining enrollments in private institutions (Hodgkinson, 1976). Institutional survival may

depend on developing a new student pool to diminish the effect of declining enrollment of the traditional student.

The student population under investigation in this study focused on full-time adult students registered in the traditional daytime program rather than part-time students registered in continuing education or evening programs. A questionnaire was designed based on problems suggested by the review of the literature. Specific items in the questionnaire were designed to identify these problems and investigate the way institutions are responding to them. While four major areas of problems were discovered, the questionnaire was designed with seven questions to allow for greater detail. The problems suggested for review which became the basis for this study are listed below:

1. Does the school have a population of returning students?
2. How does the institution define a returning adult student?
3. Is there an active recruitment program? If so, what methods do they use in their recruiting?
4. Are there special programs on their campuses for the returning adult students such as: child care, tutoring, career counseling, remedial work, support groups and peer counseling services?
5. Has the institution made any change in its staff or faculty to accommodate the returning adult?

Table 1

Sample Institutions and Methods of Data Collection

Institutions	Mail	Tele-phone	Inter-view
Allegheny College	X		
Allegheny Community College		X	
Altoona (P.S.U.)		X	
Beaver (P.S.U.)		X	
Behrend (P.S.U.)		X	
Bucknell	X		
California State		X	
Carlow College	X	X	X
Carnegie-Mellon	X		
Chatham	X		
Clarion		X	
Dickenson		X	
DuBois (P.S.U.)		X	
Duquesne	X		
Edinboro	X	X	
Fayette (P.S.U.)	X	X	
Gannon		X	
Geneva		X	
Gettysburg	X		
Grove City		X	
Harrisburg Community College	X		

Table 1, Continued

	Mail	Tele-phone	Inter-view
Indiana University of Pennsylvania	X		
Juniata	X		
LaRoche		X	
Lock Haven State		X	
Lycoming		X	
McKeesport (P.S.U.)		X	
Mercyhurst	X		
New Kensington (P.S.U.)		X	X
Point Park		X	
Robert Morris		X	
Seton Hill		X	X
Shenango Valley (P.S.U.)		X	
Slippery Rock		X	X
Saint Vincent's		X	X
Thiel	X	X	
University of Pittsburgh		X	
Villa Maria	X	X	X
Washington and Jefferson		X	
Waynesburg	X	X	
Westminster	X		
Westmoreland Community College	X		

6. Is there special funding available to help with thse programs or for the returning adult student?

7. Do the returning adult students have problems in integrating with the traditional students? Are there any academic differences?

Results

Results are reported on each of the seven survey questions. Of the forty-two colleges and universities contacted, five had to be eliminated from the survey because their responses could not be classified. Therefore, results reported here represent thirty-seven remaining institutions.

Eleven of the institutions contacted reported that they had no full time adult, day students on their campuses as defined in the survey form. These included Bucknell, Carnegie-Mellon, Grove City, Dickinson, Juniata, Robert Morris, Washington and Jefferson, Westminster, Clarion, Allegheny Community College and Allegheny College (Meadville, Pa.). The reasons given by these institutions for their lack of returning adult students varied from being located in an isolated area to being too expensive for the average returning adult student.

Eleven schools provided estimated population figures on their returning adult students. These schools varied in size and type of institution. Two are state (Indiana University and Lock Haven State), seven are branches of The Pennsylvania State University, one is community related (Harrisburg Community College), one is both church related and private (Thiel). (See Table 2).

Five schools were able to provide specific percentages for returning adults at their institutions. Three of the five schools reporting were private, church related institutions; one, (Waynesburg) is private and non-church-related; one is a public institution. Seton Hill, with 33% returning adults had the largest number; Villa Maria reported 30%; Carlow College reported 25% and Waynesburg reported 17%. The New Kensington Campus of The Pennsylvania State University reported 28%. Seven branch campuses of The Pennsylvania State University were found to have an aggregate student population of 8,329 students with 754 of them being returning adults.

Table 2

Estimated Population Figures

	Population Estimates		
Institutions	Returning Adults	Total Student Body	Percent
Thiel	30	700	4.3
Lock Haven State	200	2,124	9.4
Harrisburg Community College	3,000	5,000	60
Indiana University of Pennsylvania	650	19,000	3.4
Seven Branch Campuses, Pennsylvania State University	754	8,329	9.1

Ten institutions reported that they had a returning adults population on campus (Mercyhurst, Point Park, Gettysburg, Chatham, Edinboro, St. Vincent's, Geneva, California State, Lycoming and Westmoreland Community College), but they had not differentiated the returning adult student from the traditional student body. These schools made no differentiation between these two groups and therefore had developed no separate administrative structure to service the needs of the returning adult student.

In summary, eleven schools do not have a returning adult population. Ten have some returning adult students but have developed no procedures for identifying them. Four schools provided estimates of their traditional and adult populations and five schools reported percentages. Seven of the eight branches of The Pennsylvania State University were grouped together for ease in reporting. It is important to note that only about 15% of the institutions in the sample could actually identify their returning adult population.

1 B. Academic differences between the two groups

The concensus of those reporting on this aspect of the first question seemed to feel that, if anything, the returning adult was usually more highly motivated than the traditional student. Further, they indicated that re-entry students have firm goals in mind, know why they are in school, realize the

cost in time and money and want to do well. They also appear to integrate well with the traditional students and the traditional students do not appear to resent the older student. Thus, the returning adult student clearly can be a valuable addition to the classroom and the campus.

2. Criteria used in defining the returning adult student

Institutions who affirmed the presence of returning adults in their student body were asked to report the criteria used to identify those classified as returning adult students. One method of identification was simply to use the age of the student involved. Age limits vary from school to school (see Table 3).

Table 3

Age Criteria for Returning Adults

Age	Institution
18 yrs +	Westmoreland Community College
	Villa Maria
21 yrs +	Edinboro
	Mercyhurst
	Lycoming
22 yrs +	Waynesburg
	Geneva
	The Indiana Univeristy of Pennsylvania
	Thiel
26 yrs +	Harrisburg Community College

Another method used to identify the returning adult student is the length of an interruption of the student's education either at the post-secondary level or early in their college career. Three of the reporting schools (Chatham, Villa Maria and Gettysburg) used this criteria in identifying their returning adult population. Chatham specified seven years post-secondary interruption. Gettysburg used an interruption of three years at any point and Villa Maria specified two years post-secondary and eighteen years of age or older.

One school, California State, based their classification on maturity rather than age in years as their basis for delineation. However, no clarification of the criteria used to determine maturity was available.

A number of schools such as St. Vincent's and Point Park have an unspecified number of returning adult students and have developed no special criteria to help in identifying them.

It would seem that institutional identification of the returning adult depends on several criteria and that no concensus has developed concerning ways to denote this growing population.

3. Recruitment programs

There are several means used to recruit returning adults, including: newspaper advertising, radio and television spots,

direct mail and a variety of special in-college programs. These programs are all designed to acquaint returning adults with services that are available to them. There is also an emphasis on individualizing services and courses to suit their own unique needs.

Of the schools that responded, Villa Maria, Seton Hill, and Carlow College recruit returning adults very intensely. They use a variety of techniques including newspaper ads, seminars held at their schools and in shopping malls, hospitals or any spot that might produce interested candidates for their programs.

Community Colleges such as Harrisburg and Westmoreland Community Colleges are slightly less intense in their recruiting programs. Direct mail appears to be their main method, although they also use newspaper ads and public appearances by admissions personnel. Harrisburg Community College had the unusual approach of using a play about returning adults written and produced for and about them. It met with good success and is certainly a unique method of advertising.

Waynesburg, Point Park, Geneva and Edinboro and others rely on brochures and newspapers. Chatham uses very attractive brochures sent by direct mail as well as advertisements in newspapers.

Four of the schools in the sample apparently did little or no recruiting specific to the returning adult student. These institutions included Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Juniata, Lock Haven and Lycoming.

4. Special programs for the returning adult student

The reported programs for returning adults are as varied as the schools. Some have nothing special for these students, they are treated as traditional students. Others have programs designed to ease entrance into the school and to keep the student involved and interested as they improve their skills and discover new ones. One specific need that appears to be common among these schools is for a returning adult orientation program to help acclimate returning adults to their new surroundings.

5. Funding for the returning adult student

Recruiting programs and programs designed especially for returning adult students are an item of expense for the schools maintaining them. Money for these programs usually comes from the yearly institutional budget. Only one school, Thiel College, reported receiving a grant to help them start a life-long education program. All the other schools queried replied that their money came from the normal operating budget of the institution. One school did admit that costs were a

problem, however, no mention was made about trying to find another source of income.

Part of the expense of underwriting a returning adult program is the funding required to maintain the staff of people used to activate such a program. Of the schools reporting, fifteen (Chatham, Geneva, California State, Lycoming, Gettysburg, Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Seton Hill, plus the eight branches of The Pennsylvania State University) use their regular personnel to administer and teach in their adult programs. Two schools (Carlow College and Edinboro) select instructors from their faculty, but try to find those who are sensitive to the needs of the returning adult student. Four schools, (Villa Maria, Mercyhurst, Waynesburg and Harrisburg Community College) have an administrative staff in charge of their adult programs. These programs can be as simple as one person acting as a coordinator or as complicated as an administrator and several others working specifically with the returning adults. Two schools (Thiel and Lock Haven State) are constructing programs designed for returning adults and are in the process of selecting administrators and personnel to staff their program. Thiel has received a grant for this and Lock Haven State is proceeding slowly using available funds.

6. Special staff for the returning adult student

Sensitivity to the returning adult and their set of particular problems appears to be an important factor in the selection of faculty to work with these students. A knowledgeable and patient support staff of counselors, coordinators and/or administrators is also a virtual necessity in order to have a successful program for returning adults. Thus, most of the responding schools use their regular faculty and normal classes for the returning adult students, but they also seem to try as much as they can to use those instructors with a particular talent for getting along with the returning adults.

7. Problems of integration with the traditional student

Another possible concern with the returning adult students is their interaction with the traditional students. In a situation as highly structured as some classrooms, problems of interpersonal communication and socialization might be expected to arise. None of the responding administrators indicated that they encountered difficulties in this area. All of the responding administrators felt that their intergenerational classes functioned very smoothly and that there was a spirit of cooperation and congeniality not often found in the more traditional classroom.

Among other factors pertaining to an institution's ability to succeed in attracting and maintaining a returning adult

population appears to be the site of the school involved. Those schools located in an easily accessible, urban area with good public transportation facilities seem to have the best chance of attracting the adult student. A related consideration for most adults would be a flexible time schedule and a wide variety of course selections. Both of these situations appear to be most likely to occur in those schools that have the basic requirements of location and interest in acquiring a population of returning adult students.

Schools located in the more rural areas and smaller towns have their own problems. While they may draw students from the surrounding countryside, it is not an easy task. Transportation becomes a factor as does the flexibility of the institution in regard to course selection and classroom hours. In some cases, particularly the smaller institutions, the faculty involved is not eager to devote the necessary time to vary their class schedules in order to accommodate the new types of students. The local economy is also an area of concern for these schools. Attendance is not likely to increase in a rural area if the economy is at a low point.

The reputation of the school also plays a major role in whether or not they have returning adult programs. Some schools queried admitted that they were too expensive for the usual returning adult student. Other schools will attract a

traditional student population sufficient to support them because of their reputation is specific major areas such as engineering or pre-medicine.

However, it has become apparent to a number of administrators in western Pennsylvania that, if their school is to survive, returning adult students are likely to be a very important economic factor in achieving financial stability.

Discussion

Part of the problem in attempting to meet the needs of returning adult students involves the lack of a specific denotation of this population. As their numbers increase on college campuses, it has become apparent that this lack of definition has contributed to anomic situation in which the unique needs of these new, non-traditional students are not being met. Many colleges and universities find themselves in a situation where they are unprepared to meet the needs of a population they have not been able or willing to define. Therefore, few institutions of higher education have administrative programs to address the needs of returning adult students. The necessity for standard delineation of returning adult students is becoming increasingly apparent. As their numbers increase on college campuses their attendant problems will probably also increase. Identifying and working with these students and their problems is becoming an important task for college administrators, faculty and staff which recruit, retrain and service these unique students.

One must realize that there are indeed differences between the traditional eighteen to twenty year old student and the returning adult. The majority of the traditionally aged students come from a background of familial, financial and social stability. Returning adults, both male and female, are often faced with an

entirely different situation. They are obviously older and more experienced, with responsibilities in many areas and a need to improve their life chances through additional education. Of the total number of persons over thirty five years old enrolling in college in 1970, over one-half were women (Roach, 1976). At first, the majority of these persons were usually women who had reached that stage in their lives where their children had grown up and their domestic responsibilities had diminished. Return to college for them presented a productive, informative and emotionally regenerative alternative to mid-life ennui. Many of them had some exposure to higher education in their earlier years and this fact may be partially responsible for their electing to resume a college career. Currently, the returning adult female is most often a single-parent mother, unemployed and in search of job training, a compelling reason for returning to school (Lenz and Shavitz, 1977). She may have little or no financial support from her family or former spouse and her emotional base has very probably been thoroughly shaken. When these factors are added to her own anxieties about her ability to succeed in her school work as well as maintaining her parental role, she presents the picture of a person in need of support (emotionally, academically and socially).

If the returning adult women is still married and maintaining the responsibilities associated with homemaking, she has another

set of problems. As her educational career takes more and more of her time and interest, the members of her family may regard this as an intrusion on their rights. They may start to make demands or the student that make her feel guilty if she cannot comply because of her school work. According to Roach, 1977,

> " Trying to share her growing autonomy and heightened feelings of self-worth with her family appears often to result in an increasing amount of interpersonal strain as family members struggle to integrate the changing (perhaps to them, threatening) concept of the woman and to redefine her role in relationship to them. "

The returning adult male is often in somewhat similar psychological circumstances. He is more apt to be married, have a young family and may or may not be employed. For most of them, the main reason for returning to school was to improve their chances of obtaining a better job. If he has been unemployed for any length of time, he may be very unsure of himself. Therefore, he is likely to be even more uncertain of his own academic abilities. This appears to be a very common situtation expressed by the returning adult men in informal discussions with the researcher.

The returning adult student with the least probability of these types of problems appears to be the older adult. They are finished with family obligations and have the time and the

resources that allow them to stretch their minds and reach for new goals. However, their presence in the classroom can prove to be intimidating to some instructors. It is apparent from studies that there is really little basis for this kind of reaction. The intergenerational classroom used in one study showed more activity and had better classroom participation than the classroom composed solely of traditional freshman students (Jensen-Osinski, 1981). It's also suggested that "Adults of all ages can learn, and their experiences are beneficial to younger students in the same classroom" (Bowen, 1980).

> "Argue for your limitations
> and sure enough, they're yours."
> (Bach, 1977, p. 100)

> "You are one of the greatest
> blocks to your own learning."
> (Apps, 1981, p. 7)

The fear of returning to studying after a period of time away from the school atmosphere is probably one of the most difficult things to overcome for the returning adult. Concern about their own academic abilities; their acceptance by other, younger students, and their acceptance by the staff and faculty can be a very great deterrent to their attempting work on the college level. Only a few colleges today make the effort to ease this transition back into the academic life pattern.

Admission procedures and counseling methods (both career and academic) are still geared to the traditional student even though this pool of students is dwindling while demographic studies indicate that the pool of available returning adult students is growing. This trend is predicted to last at least for the foreseeable future (Carnahan, 1983).

Some colleges and universities have recognized this fact and are beginning to do something about it. Programs designed to facilitate re-entry are appearing in selected institutions of higher education. Some western Pennsylvania schools have developed departments expressly for the returning adults and have appointed one person to chair this department designated for the returning adult student. Carlow College in Pittsburgh is a fine example of this pattern. The school administration has created a Department of Adult Admissions with one person in charge. All returning adult candidates for admission are channeled through this office. This department is also responsible for planning and executing the recruiting program, which is very intense and productive. In addiiton, the department is in charge of follow-up meetings held six months to one year after enrollment. This follow-up procedure allows the department to provide for and find weaknesses in the overall program and to make necessary adjustments (R. V. Buckley, Personal Communicator, April 6, 1984). Under these circumstances,

the re-entry student is not only encouraged to return, but is given all the help available to make that return a success. Carlow is not alone in its efforts to attract and retain the returning adult student. Other colleges in the area have instituted coordinators whose primary function is to guide and facilitate the adult student's progress through the educational bureaucracy and into educational channels that will serve the student to the best advantage. The atmosphere created by this more personal and responsive approach can alleviate much of the adult student's re-entry anxiety.

Several other of the smaller colleges in western Pennsylvania have recruitment programs designed to attract the returning adult. These programs were originally felt to be a response to the women's liberation movement of the sixties. They are now being expanded and redesigned to fit the needs of any person who wishes to return to college. According to interviewees, recruiting of these adult students has intensified and become highly competetive. Inducements such as sample classes held at shopping centers, day long sessions at the college campus with counseling and the opportunity to attend a class if one so desires, coffee hours with other interested persons; testing and guidance conferences and the development of extremely flexible time schedules are all utilized to inform

prospective students of exactly what is available for them and how they can use it to their best advantage.

It is interesting to note that the people involved in planning and presenting these programs agree that they are valuable and worthwhile and that the techniques used appear to be working rather well. They all admitted, however, that the best program available is word of mouth from their own successful students and graduates.

An institution which hopes to build a viable returning adult population needs to provide specialized services for these students. Child care in the form of a Day Care Center or a student cooperative center is essential. Many of these returning adults are responsible for small children and they need a secure, convenient place to provide care for their child while they attend classes. Colleges with schools of Education have used this situation to their advantage by creating a laboratory classroom for their Education majors. Some schools, such as The Pennsylvania State University at New Kensington, provide child care on a cooperative basis, with the parents exchanging time or minimal amounts of money for services. This has proven to be a particularly important means for recruiting returning adults. These cooperative programs have the added advantage of being affordable.

Re-entry into the college system provides difficulties for the administration as well as the student. In many cases, the administration involved equates age with knowledge of the system and seems not to realize that the returning adult needs to become acquainted with the physical lay-out of the school as well as the necessary rules and regulations involved in the daily routine of the school. The re-entry student is frequently reluctant to admit lack of knowledge or to reveal this by asking questions (Lenz and Shavitz, 1977, p. 112). Thus another need expressed by many of the older students and addressed by too few of the institutions was for a special orientation program designed to address their specific needs. Too often, Orientation Day is directed toward the traditional student and includes little of value for the returning adult. They are asked to attend and listen and are largely ignored or made to feel as though they were just out of high school. This engenders resentment and sometimes creates uncertainty about the wisdom of returning to school at all.

If services specific to their needs are not mentioned at orientation, when a need does arise, students are forced to obtain information as best they can and it is not always accurate. It can be exasperating to find out about things too late for them to be of any value or use to the student. These students need to know who to see about veterans' rights,

government loans, grants and material of that nature. They need to know where to go and what is needed so they can use the information to best advantage. People well versed in areas of finance, remedial work and counseling (both academic and career) as well as admitting procedures and scheduling need to be available to help returning adults plan and evaluate academic progress. A more recent adjunct for helping the returning adult adjust to a new situation is the use of peer counseling. Peers with similar academic status and many of the same problems who have successfully completed one year of school are more apt to effectively assist the recently returned student.

Finances appear to be about the most pressing problem for both returning adult students and the school they choose to attend. Financial aid for the older student is usually available. However, all too often the student knows little or nothing about the facts pertaining to financial aid and information is frequently difficult to obtain, especially in the area of criteria of eligibility. Many times the requirements are unrealistic or so confusing that an interpreter is needed to clarify the information.

Information about loans, grants and Federal Acts should be clealy explained and readily accessible through one person who is knowledgeable about availability and requirements for application. This administrator is a critical component in

creating a positive, congenial atmosphere for the returning adults.

Funding for these developing adult programs comes, for the most part, from the normal annual budget of the college or university involved. Only one school in western Pennsylvania (Thiel) reported receiving a grant to help in the establishment of a returning adult program. Several schools have recognized the need for a special department and personnel devoted to working with the older returning adult student and are very actively seeking more and better sources of funding for their program.

The fear of failure is very common among the re-entry students. They often find, however, that one semester of attending classes, taking notes, reading textbooks, studying for examinations and doing associated class work is time enough to regain or sharpen their study skills. The development of these talents is usually accompanied by increased self confidence, but not always. For those who find this to be the case, remedial classes as well as tutoring should be provided when appropriate to help the academically uncertain student regain confidence in their own abilities to handle a normal academic load.

Support from other returning adults can be an integral part of the newly re-entered student's adjustment. It is comforting to know that there are others of the same age range who face many

of the same problems. In several schools organized groups of older students have developed. It is interesting too that in almost all instances where these groups exist, the impetus for them came not from the college administration, but from the returning adult students themselves. These clubs are important for the group they serve. They provide a forum for the discussion of mutual problems. If they are part of the college Student Government Association, that allows input into some of the administrative affairs on the campus which increases the returning adults' feelings of integration into campus life and may reduce any feelings of powerlessness. As a result of their increased participation in school affairs, they are recognized by others as a visible and viable entity on campus. If these students are in the vanguard of a growing movement toward life-long education, they need this kind of support and recognition to help them become role models for those yet to come.

Over the last two years, a regional movement has started designed to provide greater communication among these groups and to enhance their position on their local campus. There have been two conferences and a third is in the planning stages and scheduled for Fall, 1984 at the State University of New York in Brockport, New York. This would seem to indicate that there is a growing awareness of the returning adult student and their problems as well as a recognition of a need to share possible solutions.

An institutional atmosphere that is positive, supportive and responsive to returning adults is imperative for this new student aggregate. Acceptance by the faculty and personnel on their campus is a high priority need for the re-entry student because it lends legitimacy to their existence. It is apparent that an administrative group headed by one person, staffed with trained and highly motivated personnel and through which all incoming returning adult students are channeled creates the ideal situation for these students and insures the possibility of a high degree of success for them.

Those schools that have already created this type of administrative attitude are achieving excellent results with their returning adult students, both academically and psychologically. The adults appear to be doing very well and programs are starting to expand rapidly in order to keep up with the increasing pace of enrollment.

Several schools have designed programs devoted to testing, guidance counseling and group discussion periods centering on those life problems that have brought the prospective student to their present situation. Through these sessions, possible solutions or alternatives for their problems are developed and prospective students may be moved to change the course of their lives. Some of these programs carry an acronymic name such as L. E. A. P., a program proposed for the New Kensington

Branch of The Pennsylvania State University. This program was designed by three members of the returning adult group on campus and their two faculty advisors. It is designed to acquaint prospective students with what is available for them and to allow them time to analyze their own needs and plan a program tailored in such a way that they will achieve maximum benefits (Uncapher et al, 1983).

Other schools have adopted more formal names for this returning adult programs, such at "Gateway" (Chatham), but they still have the same end in mind. No matter how it looks or sounds, these names all promise much the same thing; an opportunity to expand horizons and explore new areas and find out what is now available for the returning adult student.

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Appendix A

Mail Survey Instrument

February 22, 1984

As a student at the New Kensington Branch of The Pennsylvania State University this term I am engaged in a research project surveying the demand for Adult Education programs and policies and practices used by institutions enrolling these students.

I am interested in adult students who are taking traditional day programs or courses rather than Continuing Education students or those who attend night classes.

Any information you might send me regarding the ways in which you service these students in areas of recruitment, enrollment and counseling would be very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jean Templin

Appendix B

Telephone Survey Instrument

School_____ Date_____

1. Do you have a significant returning adult population?
   Do they differ academically from the traditional student?

2. What is your definition of a returning adult student?

3. Do you have an active recruitment program?

4. Do you have special programs for the returning adult student?
   e.g. Orientation, Child Care, Tutoring, Remedial Work,
   Support Group

5. Do you have any special funding for these programs?

6. Have you made any staff changes to accommodate the
   returning adults?

7. Do your returning adult students have any problems of
   integration with the traditional students?